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APPLYING MODERN INTERACTIVE TECHNOLOGIES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDY

Abstract: This article touches upon the topic of modern interactive technologies and how their appliance in the process of language teaching, language learning and learning management can help both teachers and learners increase their performance and productivity. To illustrate this, the article is divided into three sections, each describing a different form of interactive media that can be helpful during the teaching and learning process. The first section talks about videogames and how they can be used to study a foreign language; special attention is paid to videogames designed with a sole purpose of aiding language learning. The second section is devoted to various social networks and language study apps and their usefulness in the process of language learning. Finally, the third section describes how various Learning Management Systems (or LMS) can be used by teachers and students to organize their educational environment and find better and easier ways to communicate with each other.

Keywords: interactive technologies, modern technologies, language teaching, language learning, learning management, videogames, online services, social networks, learning apps.

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ПРИМЕНЕНИЕ СОВРЕМЕННЫХ ИНТЕРАКТИВНЫХ ТЕХНОЛОГИЙ В ПРОЦЕССЕ ИЗУЧЕНИЯ ИНОСТРАННОГО ЯЗЫКА

Аннотация: Данная статья посвящена теме современных интерактивных технологий и тому, как их применение в процессе обучения/преподавания иностранного языка и организации учебного процесса может способствовать повышению продуктивности как среди преподавателей, так и среди студентов. В целях наглядности статья состоит из трех разделов, каждый из которых затрагивает один из видов современных интерактивных технологий и способы его использования в процессе обучения и преподавания иностранного языка. Первый раздел рассказывает о видеоиграх и их применении в учебном процессе, отдельное внимание уделяется тем видеоиграм, которые непосредственно разработаны с целью обучения иностранным языкам. Во втором разделе говорится о различных социальных сетях и приложениях для изучения иностранного языка, которые могут быть задействованы в процессе обучения. Наконец, в третьем разделе описываются способы применения различных систем управления учебным процессом (LMS), которые могут помочь учителям и студентам упростить коммуникацию друг с другом в ходе обучения и преподавания иностранного языка.

Ключевые слова: интерактивные технологии, современные технологии, преподавание иностранного языка, изучение иностранного языка, организация учебного процесса, видеоигры, онлайн-сервисы, социальные сети, приложения для изучения иностранного языка.

Every language teacher will tell you that one of the hardest things to

do while teaching either children or adults is keeping your students' attention and interest in the subject. Language learning requires a lot of brain activity, and many students tend to get really bored and exhausted with just reading textbooks and repeating after their teachers. This is especially noticeable with children, as their attention span is significantly lower than the one of an adult, thus they are quicker to deem the lesson to be «not fun» and stop listening to their tutor. And while adults are more focused on their studies than children, they also may fall a victim to an overly tedious class, which will impact their performance. That is why many teachers actively add some interactive study breaks into their curricula, like playing games, doing quizzes, watching videos, etc. Moreover, with technologies such as computers, smartphones and the Internet being widespread nowadays, a lot of new interactive means of studying, which succeed in keeping the student's attention and interest arise. Here are some of these means – videogames, online social networks and Learning Management Services or *LMS* – and the ways how both teachers and students can use them in the process of language learning and management of language courses.

Videogames

As it was stated before, interactive learning may help students to better understand the material and be more enthusiastic about the whole learning process. Educational videogames and software offer to bring new level of such interactivity into classes. It is no secret that videogames have become a phenomenon of modern society – Entertainment Software Association (ESA) reports, that four out of five U.S households own a device used to play video games, with each game-playing family having an average of two gamers in it. Videogames attract people of all ages and genders (26% of all gamers are under 18 years old, 30% are 18-35 years old; 44% of all gamer population are female, according to the ESA) [3], as this medium offers all that is required from good entertainment: vivid colours, dynamic action and interesting gameplay (story). Videogames also lower anxiety, making the acquisition of input more likely [2], so, introduction of videogames into the learning process may improve the learners' performance, as they will receive an additional motivation to study – to gain knowledge in an interesting and exciting way. Foreign language learning is no exception, as some modern videogames were designed specifically for this purpose. For example, a game called **Influent**, set in a 3D representation of an average house, allows its players to learn some basic vocabulary through the process of exploration of the

given 3D environment, where every object that you see can be highlighted, prompting an entry with its name, pronunciation and translation to appear on the screen. The object's name is pronounced by native speakers, helping the learners remember the correct pronunciation of foreign words. Some objects also have additional words connected to them, e.g. «*book*» will also have an adjective «*interesting*» and a verb «*to read*» in its entry. Moreover, some objects also have two or more nouns linked to them, like the aforementioned *book* will have both «*book*» and «*novel*» nouns in its entry, or *table lamp* will have «*lamp*» and «*light*». Players can add newly-found words to the dictionaries, knowledge of which will then be tested in various mini-games and quizzes. Thus, the gameplay is challenging, educational and entertaining. Currently, there are 17 language packs available for purchase, including English, German, French, Russian, Italian, Japanese, Dutch, etc, and this list continues to expand with the help from the game's community. Despite the fact that the game is not capable of giving full and deep knowledge of the language on its own, it can serve as a great and exciting way for beginners to learn some basic words.

While educational videogames are designed specifically with the intention to help language students and their teachers in the learning process, other videogames can also be useful. Just like watching foreign films with original voice tracks or listening to foreign songs and reading foreign books, playing foreign videogames helps a language learner to get more acquainted with «alive», contemporary language. Even more so, word count of most modern videogames (especially role-playing games and quests) is astonishing: 2009's title «**Dragon Age: Origins**» contains around one million words, almost as much as the whole Harry Potter saga (which is seven books) [1]. This means that during one playthrough of the game, a language learner can drastically improve their vocabulary, while taking part in an engaging and complex story.

Social networks and language study apps

However, not every learner is able to play videogames due to technical limitations or time constraints. Thus, other means of interactive learning, like different educational apps and internet services, may be of assistance. They may be far less complex than videogames, but they are also much more accessible and easier to work with, as you can study on the move, via your phone or tablet. Various services offer interactive language courses over the Internet, like widely-praised website **Memrise** (also available as an app on both **AppStore** and **Google Play**). It allows its users (among whom there are native speakers of various languages and

professional language teachers) to create educational courses, which then can be passed by other users. These courses vary in their difficulty, so every language learner will be able to find something that will suit them, while teachers can create courses specifically for their students, focusing on some particular topics, and asking their pupils to complete these courses as part of their homework. Students are also able to compete with each other, comparing their progress and achievements, which motivates them to improve their performance.

But, the most important thing language lessons usually lack is communication practice, and the two aforementioned methods of interactive learning cannot offer much in that regard. While learners can converse with each other and their teacher, gaining some communicational skills in the process, or pick up some common expressions while playing videogames or completing interactive courses, it is nothing compared to talking to a native speaker. And in this field, various social networks may prove to be very useful. The notion of «pen friendship» has existed for a long time, but development of the Internet gives it a new beginning, destroying geographical boundaries. For example, various web sites like **GlobalPenFriends.com** helps people seeking for «pen pals» to find them quicker and easier, making international friendship much more possible. Global social networks like **Facebook** or **Google+** attract people from all over the world, so it is not that hard to find some foreign peers there. A number of social networks designed specifically for the purpose of language learning also exist, like **lang-8.com**, a livejournal-style website, built on the principle of «peer assessment»: students select their native language and the language they study, and are then offered to write some entries in said language for their newly-created blog. Then, all registered native speakers of this language see these entries in their newsfeeds, and are able to assess and to grade them, while leaving some comments on the subject matter. This helps the students to master both the language and communication skills, which is exactly what is expected from them.

Learning Management Systems (LMS)

Naturally, educational process consists not only of the language learning itself. Course organization and management of student groups are also essential for creating a productive study environment. This is a daunting task, especially when a teacher has more than one group of learners and more than one course, meaning that they have to constantly switch between various email addresses and group chats to keep their students updated about the course. To help teacher mitigate some of these

problems, the so-called *Learning Management Systems* (or *LMS*) were developed. One of the most prominent of them is the **Google Classroom**. Another notable LMS are **Microsoft Classroom**, **Edmodo** and **Schoology**.

Typically, classroom management services like Google Classroom allow teachers to create an online page for their course or courses and invite students to join it. By using these platforms teachers can easily organize all their groups and courses in one platform and have a quick way to communicate with their students, notify them about any changes to the scheduling of their classes, post various course-related materials, and, most importantly, give the learners online assignments. This effectively eliminates the very old problem of some students coming unprepared for their classes because they have been absent from the previous one and never got the home task or assignment that the teacher was orally giving to the group. Moreover, the teacher can set deadlines for their assignment to let students know when they should hand them in. Students can send completed assignments to the teacher via the same platform, allowing the teacher to check their tasks, grade them and return completed assignments to students with any necessary corrections and comments.

All in all, classroom management services like Google Classroom can help teachers transfer most of their menial organizational tasks to an easily-accessible and simple online platform and devote more of their time to the language teaching itself.

So, it is not possible to cover all the options that modern technologies provide in the field of interactive language study in a single paper. However, this article makes it clear that these technologies do offer brand new means of studying, both educational and entertaining, and that these opportunities should not be ignored. Furthermore, by employing modern technologies in the process of learning management teachers can focus on their most important tasks without spending much time on insignificant ones. Therefore, language teachers and learners alike must pay more attention to these innovative ways of studying.

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